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ABSTRACT

Aimed at acquainting taxpayers with Texas public schools, this collection presents 14 illustrated articles describing examples of strong elementary and secondary school programs in districts across the state. The first three articles report on Wichita Falls' successful elementary reading instruction program; Houston's magnet schools, which offer specialized academic programs and promote desegregation; and Plains' learning resources center, which addresses a broad range of student and community interests. Next, an itinerant special education van servicing the Panhandle, a free enterprise economics course in Pine Tree High School, and rapidly growing Fort Bend's change management program are discussed. The articles following cover microcomputer education in Klein, El Paso's district planetarium, and stiffened promotion and graduation requirements in Dallas. Gifted and talented education in McAllen, an international baccalaureate program in Houston, and Cypress-Fairbank's freshman study skills program are also described. The final two reports are devoted to the restoration projects of Jefferson's Junior Historians and computer-assisted bilingual education in Mission. (MJL)

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Texas Public Schools:

A Sampling of Excellence

EA 016 523

To the Citizens of Texas:

This publication is designed to present you, the citizens and taxpayers of Texas, an inside view of your public schools.

The 14 illustrated feature articles describe some of the strongest elementary and secondary programs now underway in all sections of the state. These programs, along with the many comparable efforts evident in countless other school districts, typify the Texas commitment to a sound and progressive system of public education. It is, in short, a sampling of excellence.

Joe Kelly Butler, Chairman
State Board of Education

Raymon L. Bynum
Commissioner of Education

Texas Public Schools:

A Sampling of Excellence

Texas Education Agency
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Texas Education Agency

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WICHITA FALLS: Reading

Reading for most of us is a semi-automatic miracle, an easy shifting of mental gears to comprehend the printed world in which we live.

The print on the sign says STOP, and we stop. The print on the book says SHAKESPEARE, and we enjoy.

We are surrounded by the written symbols of our civilization. They direct our movements and open our minds. This is reading? We don't give it a second thought.

Yet, for some children, learning to read is life's greatest anguish this side of the principal's office. It is tedious, frustrating, and maybe even a bit dull. It is not fun.

What's a teacher to do?

The Wichita Falls Independent School District asks that question every year—and continues to refine its answers into one of this state's most effective reading programs.

Quiet moments, storybook characters help begin lifetime of reading.

Ideas Are Built on Flexibility

"We're not doing anything flashy," Wanda Davis, district reading supervisor, says. "We just keep building on good ideas that work."

Keyed to flexibility in both organization and materials, the program places strong emphasis on reading for meaning.

"Children decode or unlock words in many different ways," Mrs. Davis explains. "Good reading teachers know this, so they use many different approaches, too. There is no 'one way' to teach a child to read."

There are many ways and they carry deceptively short definitions. Here are just three examples: phonics, structural analysis, context clues.

These terms, and the theories behind them, are the breath of professional life to the reading teacher. Stored in some handy mental kit, they are pulled out, sorted, adapted, and rearranged again to help some youngster through combat with the mysteries of the printed word.

This is the way teachers work, but it's not the way they talk about teaching.

"A good reading teacher," one told us in a Wichita Falls elementary school, "must first of all love to read.

"Then, she must know children and how to work with them where they are.

"Next, she must understand a whole variety of approaches to reading—and which child can benefit from each one.

"And she must understand that children need to be praised."

Then she smiled—and turned back to her world of small children and lived-in books. Does this teacher's approach bring success in the classroom?

Two days earlier a third grade youngster ran all the way home from the bus stop, opened her book and, still almost out of breath, showed her mother how much she had learned to read.

Until now "Reading" had been a synonym for failure. Until today. Today was magic for one little girl.

Her father sent roses to the teacher.

Learning to Read Creates Lifetime Skill

Wichita Falls classrooms and campuses are shaped into a number of different teaching configurations. But, all focus on reading as a lifetime skill.

"We use a continuous progress approach throughout the system," Mrs. Davis says. "We hope each child will be successful in reading and develop the capacity to read and enjoy it to the fullest."

A number of elementary schools use team teaching for reading as well as other subjects. Others employ cross-grouping, a strategy that allows teachers at the same level to exchange students in an effort to find the most workable approaches.

"Time is the key," Mrs. Davis explains. "Each elementary student spends at least 90 minutes a day reading, writing, and spelling. A student may also be assigned to another grade—higher or lower—for reading instruction."

This emphasis on individual progress continues into the secondary schools as a required subject for junior high students. All ninth graders reading below grade level, for example, must attend a special Reading/English laboratory. Senior high students may continue to develop their individual skills through advanced courses in special reading techniques.

The district-wide effort is built on a strong inservice program, for school principals and for teachers.

Students use books, recorders to build skills at individual pace.

Listening center helps combine books, cassettes.

"Our principals have given this program their strong support from the beginning," Mrs. Davis points out. "As a result, they are keenly aware of both the learning and teaching specifics."

In Wichita Falls, every teacher is a teacher of reading.

"We conduct inservice programs in all our schools every year," Mrs. Davis says. "This way, we make sure the focus on the student's ability to read is never blurred."

Each year, also, district objectives are measured through a series of tests scored both on national norms and against specific criteria set for Wichita Falls and for all Texas students. Here are a few examples of the results:

Second grade scores on the California Achievement Test jumped from 1.9 (first grade plus nine months) to 3.3 (third grade plus three months) between September and May in the 1979-80 school year.

Eighth grade students (now in the ninth grade) were reading at the 9.9 level district-wide. The low score was 8.7 while the high score hit 11.

The district's latest Scholastic Aptitude Test reading comprehension scores show the following:

Wichita Falls	44.8
Texas	41.9
National	42.5

Nothing flashy here. Just a solid, well-designed program that works. Like reading itself, it may be a semi-automatic miracle

HOUSTON: Magnet Schools

A magnet school is your down-the-block neighborhood campus—with a whole city for its neighborhood.

It brings young children to an old school still shining with a half-century of continuous use and well-buffered wax.

It is born again among the double-decked freeways, bringing new architecture and a young population back to a part of town nearly everyone forgot.

It offers the old verities and the three R's. It is backstage on opening night, emergency tests in a hospital lab, space flight equipment dwarfing an engineer's shop.

The magnet school is, in short, a place where students and the society they live in blend their mutual interests in a specialized academic program.

A magnet may be any school. The Houston Independent School District map is dotted with magnets, each pulling its client students from down the street and across the city and its suburbs. While race is a factor, it is not the only one in deciding who enters and who doesn't.

"We look for interest first of all," one magnet school principal says. "For without interest there is no commitment—and without commitment we would simply waste each other's time."

The Houston magnet schools, like similar efforts in Dallas, were designed to put a truly educational impetus behind the desegregation orders of the federal courts. The theory was simple and to the point: Make each program so effective that students will voluntarily return to inner city schools which meet their special interests.

Today these schools may well be our best symbols of the diversity possible in public education. They offer something for almost everyone.

Elementary magnets offer programs ranging from child-centered Montessori instruction to the highly disciplined fundamentals. Middle and junior high magnets open their doors to an expanding range of options with the fine arts, math, and science continuing to rank high on the list.

And to anyone who graduated from high school just 10 years ago, the magnet list of courses might have been drawn on the moon.

Magnets Offer Multiple Options to Students

The choice between college prep and non-college prep is no longer the sole option presented a 14-year-old suddenly confronted by his or her future. Magnet high school areas of concentration cover almost every major opportunity offered by the city. They range from aerodynamics to petro-chemicals, from foreign languages to the visual and performing arts, from communication to law enforcement, from engineering to medicine.

Houston, the nation's sixth largest school district, and its 22 suburban neighbors are working together to meet two objectives:

(1) Offer specialized academic programs to students throughout the Greater Houston area.

(2) Implement the Voluntary Interdistrict Educational Plan developed cooperatively under the direction of the Texas Education Agency.

The federal court in 1975 accepted the Houston Magnet School Plan as one means of providing quality integrated education. The plan, product of a

joint district-community effort, offered a positive but admittedly partial answer to a growing problem.

For Houston, as a result of massive shifts in population, was rapidly becoming an all-minority school district.

Plan Moves Houston Away From All-Minority Trend

In 1979 the federal court asked the Texas Education Agency to submit a plan which would encourage inter-district cooperation in helping to desegregate the city's schools. The Voluntary Interdistrict Educational Plan which resulted is both helping to build and to build on the magnet school program.

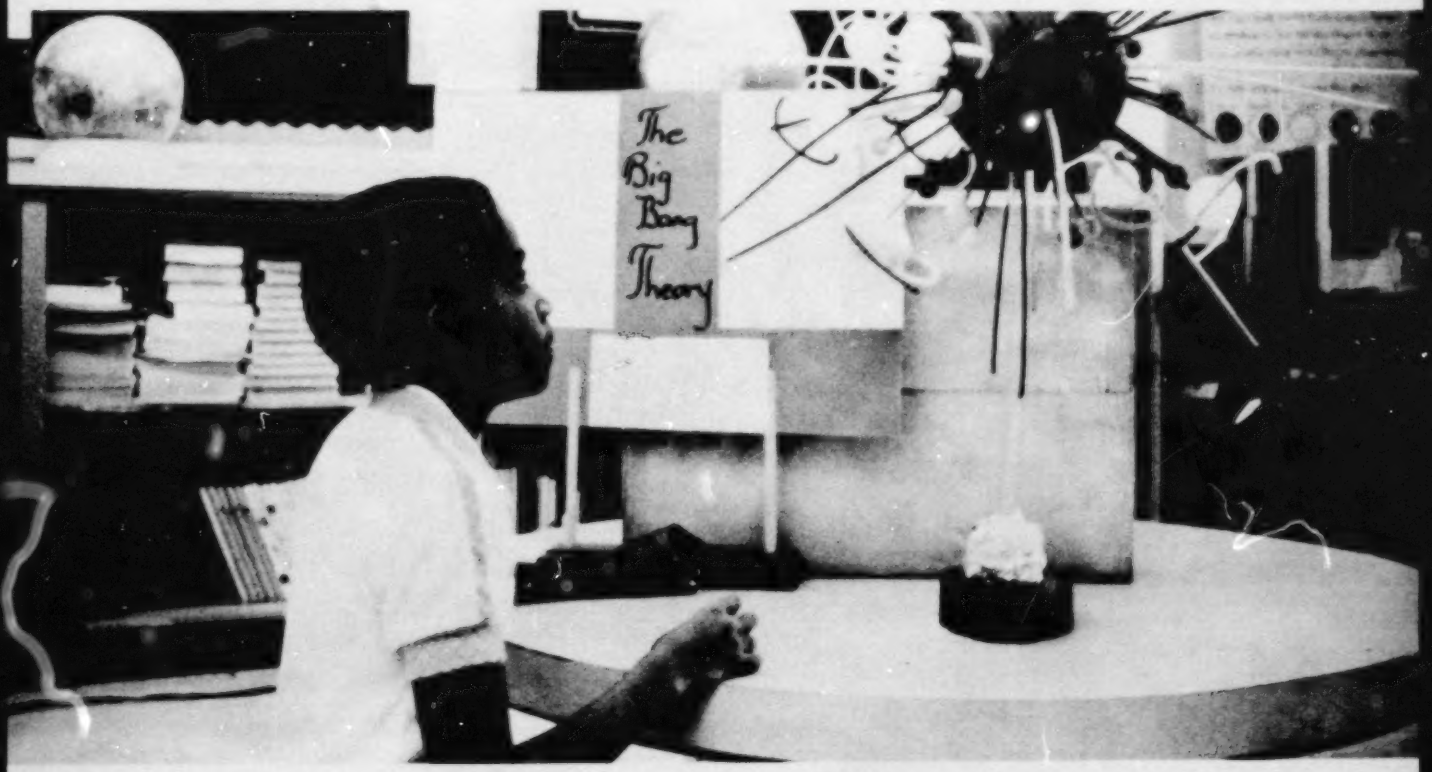
Dr. Billy R. Reagan, general superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, captures these four years of progress in a single sentence.

"We're making substantial changes in education—and we're learning a lot."

These changes—in student attitudes, in curriculum, in buildings, in classrooms, in results—are among the most visible anywhere in the country. There is only one way to really see them. You have to get into the schools and watch things happen.

That is what we did. And we'd like to take you with us along the freeways, down the exit ramps, and around the neighborhoods. We won't go everywhere; there isn't time. But, we will give you a sense of the day-by-day excitement students and teachers seem to share as they make schooling a whole new experience.

While the real world of the working adult underwrites the special curriculum at each magnet high school, it is seldom more "real" than in the High School



Student studies "Big Bang" theory model of creation of the Universe.

Hula hoops help children loosen up for serious exercise later.

for the Health Professions. For example, 30 graduates who have completed their first four years of college are now in medical or dental school. Of all the school's graduates, 94 percent are now engaged in some phase of the profession, either as students or working technicians and laboratory assistants.

Once housed in an un-campus of temporary frame buildings tucked under the live oak trees of Baylor Medical Center, the school now occupies a new and still pristine building designed for its own special mix of classrooms plus science and medical laboratories.

Health Professions students obviously thrive under their academic schizophrenia, sharing a split faculty with teenage aplomb. Regular courses are taught by Houston district teachers while the classes in medical laboratory techniques, public and environmental health, dental assisting, and patient care are offered by faculty from the Baylor College of Medicine.

Arts High School Is National Pioneer

Deeper into the heart of the city, bordered roughly by Westheimer and Southwest Freeway, the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts is settling into its new campus of studios, rehearsal halls, concert hall, art gallery, and classrooms.

One of the first schools of its kind in the nation, HSPVA began its arts and academic career in 1971 as the district's first alternative high school. Today, it offers some 550 students from 51 Houston schools, 52 other public and

Heat impact on chemical holds attention during laboratory experiment.

private schools from throughout Texas, 16 other states, and nine foreign countries something special—an unacademic yet close association with the artist and and his or her world.

At the same time, the academic faculty of certified teachers guarantees these youngsters a solid all-around education.

Students spend three hours each day working in their own art area, sketching or painting, rehearsing their lines or learning new steps, carving forms in clay or lighting the set for a television production. The remaining four hours are more traditional with regular high school courses in languages, science, social studies, and mathematics.

"While 90 percent of our students go on to university or other advanced study, about half branch out into other fields," one faculty member points out. "We're educating the culture consumers as well as the artists of tomorrow."

The High School for Engineering Professions, a school-within-a-school at Booker T. Washington, is the only predominantly black high school in the nation preparing students specifically for college engineering studies. Some 500 young men and women, nearly one-third of the student body, spend much of their academic day studying computer science, calculus, communications, and other courses critical to the future engineer.

And they are not alone. Executives from 22 Houston area industries and foundations who helped plan and finance the program continue to watch its prog-

ress and offer advice or assistance. This "Who's Who" list of firms helped design laboratories, upgrade equipment, and even teach courses.

They are helping the Houston district form a community of excellence in public education.

Focused Programs Bring Magnet Idea to Elementary Schools

Across town we put on our mental jogging shoes to take a turn around the indoor and outdoor athletic facilities at the Physical Development Academy of Roberts Elementary School. Some 500 children, all eager to turn their three- and four-foot bodies into efficient moving machines, climb and balance and tumble and jump and run through daily planned fitness routines. Again, regular school goes right along with this special interest work as a magnetic extra.

All 63 Houston magnet schools follow the lead of both student interests and the opportunities available in the city itself.

Magnet schools come in all sizes and configurations. They are as different as test tubes and trampolines. Yet, all offer that one touch of near magic that can spark new life into a whole school system: An adult respect for student dreams.

For many magnet high school students the academic day—counting bus rides in and out of the city—is 12 hours long. But, they don't seem to miss the old free time. As one future symphony orchestra violinist told us, "If it weren't for schools like this, I don't know what I'd do."

Fortunately, there are schools like this, schools where a student can learn and "do" at the same time.

PLAINS: Small School

If your vision of a one school town is drawn in gravel road-grassy hilltop-little red clapboard cliches--look again.

Or drive one of those sandswept highways out west of Lubbock where the country has flattened its face to the wind and hidden its only surprises in the local school house.

For here, in towns with names indigenous to the land and its history, the one-room-with-bell tradition has gone the way of Cinderella's pumpkin. The modern public school "coach" is indeed something to see.

Plains is that kind of town. And the school district is its heart.

Whole families swim in the district's Olympic-size pool for five hours each summer day, watch student-produced television via the local cable channel, then return at night for aerobics or woodworking.

"We're involved in our town," Superintendent Dean Andrews says, exhibiting the West Texan's classic flair for understatement. "And we like it that way."

The district's learning resources center, an octagon of brick and glass built on a vacant lot that once separated the junior and senior high school units, is the focal point for much of this effort. It is here that CAST (Communication Arts and Science Training) does its number for both town and campus.

Student-Run Radio Fills Yoakum County Air Waves

The program is something more than typical and particularly for a school district with an average daily attendance of fewer than 500 students.

CAST puts the school district into daily contact with every radio listener in Yoakum County at 7 each morning when KPLN-FM begins its broadcast day. High school students take over the microphone 30 minutes later, continuing a schedule of music, newscasts, and other features to sign-off time at 4 p.m.

Seventeen high school students take turns checking the Associated Press newswire selecting music, taping local programs, and keeping pace with all the time-and-cues routine necessary to keep a radio station on the air.

"We have two students on the control board at all times," Andrews explains. "When one team goes to class, another is on hand to take over. These kids know they're operating the only FM radio station in Yoakum County, so they're serious about doing a good job."

Pictures joined sound in 1980 when the district gained access to television through the Plains cable service. The arrangement was simple. If the district would string about 3,000 feet of wire from school to transmitter, the cable company would provide the small computer and other basic start-up equipment.

It worked.

Today, Plains High School can send 15 students into the press box, down to the sidelines, and behind the control panel whenever the home town Cowboys take to the field. And that's just Friday nights during football season.

The videotaped game, complete with fades, slow motion, and instant replays is telecast locally four times on Saturday and once on Sunday over cable into 375 of the total 450 homes in Plains.

"I think any rating survey would show we can out-pull just about any program on cable or the networks when we put Plains football or other programs on the air," Andrews says.

School and Sports Come Home on Cable TV

Today, the school owns three color videotape cameras (two for sidelines and one upstairs during football games) plus one color and three black and white monitors mounted on a home-built control panel.

Student directors operate the control panel from a small van parked under the stadium press box. Their more mobile camera operators, wearing headphones like those used on oil drilling rigs, keep in touch through hundreds of feet of cable.

"We don't telecast live games, but once the last down has been played we're ready to go with the videotape—complete with play-by-play action reports from our own student announcers," Andrews says.

Other school events recorded on tape for cable programming include band concerts, basketball and volleyball games, elementary school song programs, and dramatic productions.

Radio and television CAST students and their classmates can call up a variety of special interests through the district resources center. The range seems as endless as the cotton fields bordering the string straight highway. Some samples?

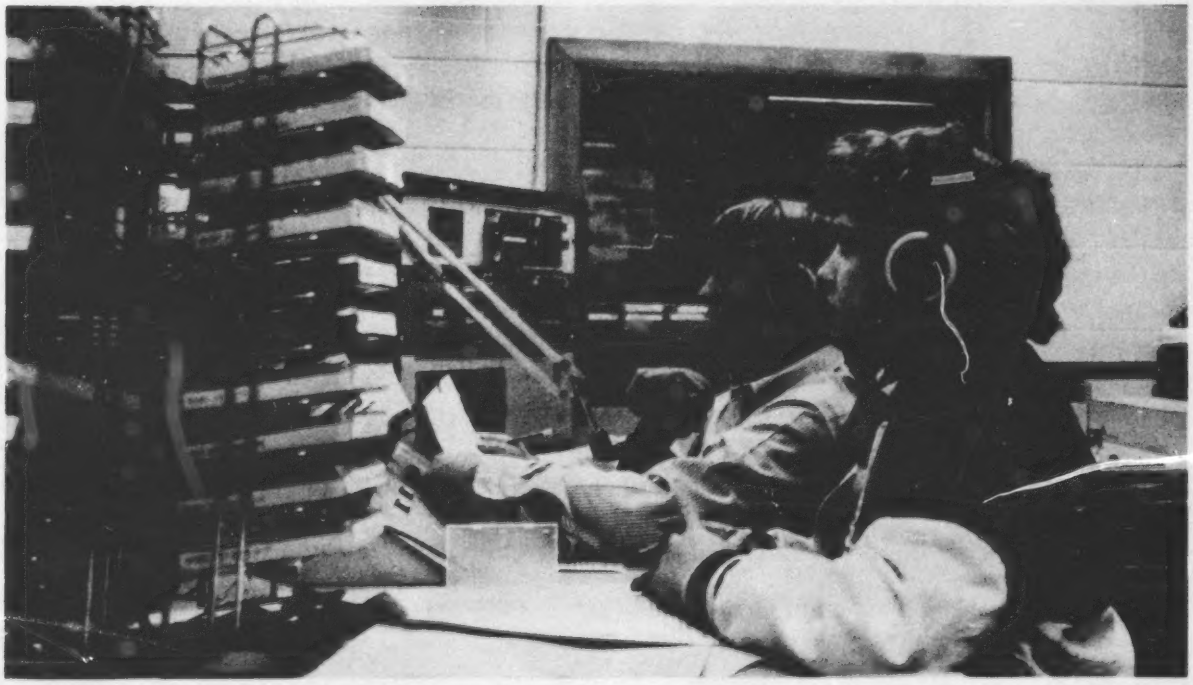
Resources Center Meets Wide Range of Interests

American folk music to astronomy, computer programming to creative writing, World War II to writing the term paper.

"After all," Andrews points out, "a good education includes student interests as well as the academic subjects required for graduation."

A photo darkroom, music practice rooms equipped with electric organs and electronic pianos, and a well-stocked library complete the center's equipment available to interested junior and senior high students.

Other youngsters, more skilled with their hands, select other options.



Senior team broadcasts news, music from high school studio.

Sound, pictures blend on control panel built by students.

"We're especially proud of our vocational classes for students who want to develop skills they will need to earn a living or just to meet the now-and-then crisis at home," Andrews says.

Nearly 30 boys and girls are enrolled in school courses in metal construction, electricity, concrete masonry, general carpentry, and plumbing.

"Not long ago one of our students helped tear down a building in town. Then, he stripped the used lumber down to where it was 'new' again—and built a porch swing for his parents. He was proud of the swing. And we were proud of him."

Plains (town) is proud of Plains (school district), too.

EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER XVI: Special Education Van

The big white van, 32 feet long and built to ramble among pine trees and sand dunes, turned off the highway leading into Borger, took a hard left into a street lined with neat brick houses, and eased into a vacant space between two driveways.

Inside, one man and three young women checked reports from an earlier visit, gathered up notebooks and clipboards, and unlatched the rear door.

Erin, a tiny blond 13-months-old youngster victimized by genetics into a condition described as "failure to thrive," and her mother waited in a doorway.

One of the little girl's eyes is covered with a fresh patch, an expedient designed to keep both eyes from crossing. Her tongue is attached differently from most, but that doesn't keep her from laughing. And her high shoes are specially built to help correct little feet bent into the wrong shape, but gradually straightening to a more walkable conformation.

"Hi!" Erin said as her friends walked across the front yard.

"We're glad to see you," her mother smiled. "We're glad to be here." The first day of the week had begun.

This is the way most days begin for the related services team from Education Service Center Region XVI in Amarillo. For this special education traveling unit, the only one of its kind in the state offering direct services to students, spends at least three days every week on the road.

That road is often long. It leads to 72 school districts in 26 counties spotted across 25,000 square miles of the Texas Panhandle.

Therapist checks progress in correcting child's feet.

The basic itinerant team includes an occupational therapist, a physical therapist, and a speech pathologist. Its work is coordinated by an associate school psychologist who also travels with the unit much of the time. Other specialists who may be counted on some trips include the service center's educational diagnostician and consultants who work with the visually and hearing impaired.

Working with teachers, parents, and the children themselves, the team offers the schools and parents specific guidance on three key points: (1) Here's what's wrong. (2) Here's what you can do about it. (3) Here's how you can go about doing it.

"Basically, we try to find out how the child is interacting with other people, what he or she is able to do—and then determine what's missing," Dr. Gene Norman, Region XVI ESC program director for special education, explains.

Treatment Team Offers Itinerant Services

Each team member brings specific skills to helping Erin and some 300 other multiply handicapped children visited at home or in classrooms about once every 10 days. This is what they do.

Associate School Psychologist—The psychologist determines the mental age level and identifies the kind of help a child needs. About 10 percent of these children can be tested, a relatively small number when working with groups of students. As a result, much of the information is gathered through interviews with parents, physicians, and teachers.

Physical Therapist—Most children in need of physical therapy have suffered damage to the nervous system as a result of cerebral palsy. They must be taught to do things other babies do naturally as a part of their own development. The physical therapist teaches parents how to help their handicapped child relax, how to develop movement, and how to prevent future deformities.

Occupational Therapist—Children develop 24 hours a day, so training must be a continuing effort by both parents and teachers. The occupational therapist concentrates on functions which can lead to future independence, including how to dress, how to pull on socks and shoes, how to eat, and how to drink.

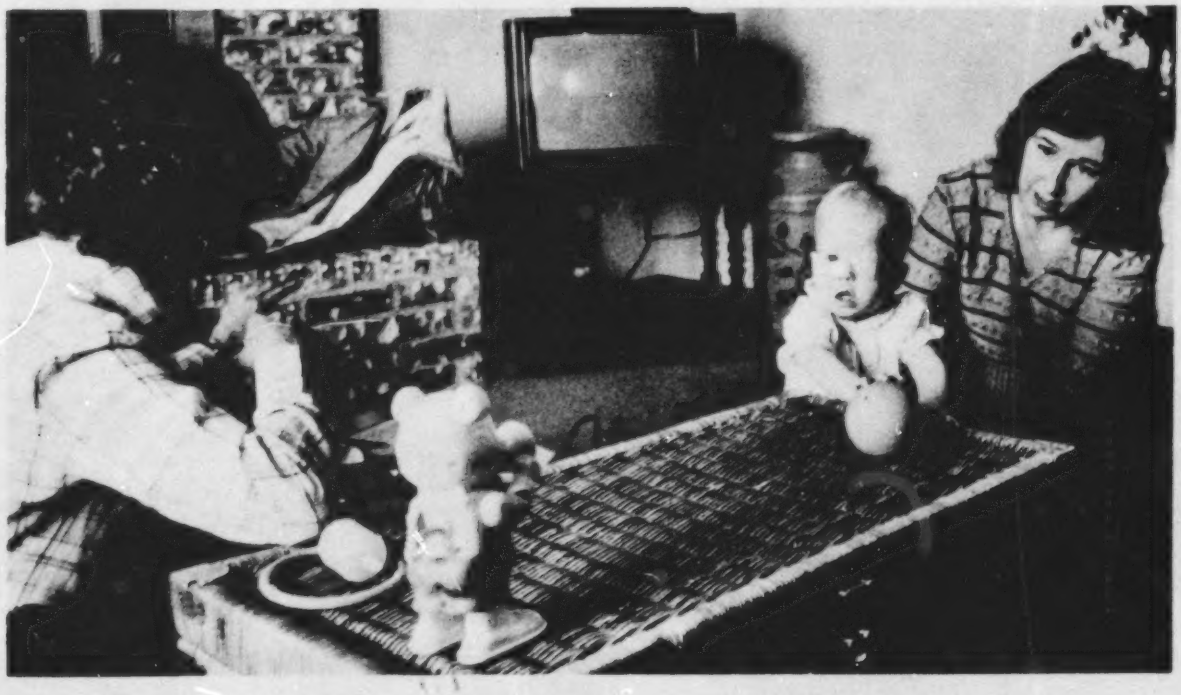
Speech Pathologist—The pathologist helps the child to utter sounds, any kind of sounds. Then, they work with the parents and the child to build those sounds into a workable communications system. Speech pathologists also teach parents not to do everything for the child but to allow the handicapped youngster to become as self-sufficient as possible. Some of these children have the motor skills, but not the experience, to do things for themselves. They also help the child to learn to play, for play is children's work.

Erin, happily rolling a ball or squeezing a toy, is analyzed, observed, noted, and encouraged during the 30-minute visit. In a few days her mother will receive a detailed report in the mail, complete with suggestions for new activities.

Next stop: a public school classroom populated by a group of multiply handicapped children. Here, more than a dozen youngsters enrolled in elementary school struggle to sit, to eat, to talk, to walk, to drink a glass of water, to learn.

These are the children who once lived in home-bound isolation or in private and state institutions, separated from the world of the school or even the neighborhood. Then, in 1976, the 50-state "Child Find" effort generated by the U.S. Office of Education, focused this nation's attention on its handicapped children.

Ball becomes therapy tool as toddler builds eye-hand coordination.



Van is treatment center for hyperactive boy.

Clients Range From Babies to Young Adults

Today, some 10,000 children and young people aged seven months to 22 years are being served by the public schools in the Texas Panhandle. Most are able to attend regular public school classes, either full or part-time.

Others, like these children in special classrooms or still at home, are touched with experience and caring by the people in the big white van.

They may, like the boy in a wheel chair, find themselves carried into the van on a specially built hydraulic lift. Or, they may climb aboard under their own power for hearing tests.

Specially built chairs, auditory testing equipment, and teaching materials designed to check progress and sketch new paths of learning for disabled children fill closets and cabinets tucked into every corner of the van. And they are used every day this rolling clinic/classroom is on the road.

"Erin and all the other children, their parents, and their teachers need the most effective help we can bring them," Dr. Norman points out. "We try to bring them that help on a continuing basis, week after week."

Late in the afternoon the van pulled out of Borger and began the long ride down the familiar highway to Amarillo.

Tomorrow?

There is always another road, another town, another classroom, another child in need of help.

PINE TREE: Free Enterprise

Three social studies teachers at Pine Tree High School have come up with a clear answer to an old question: Yes. You can teach the American Dream.

You can define it, break it into logical components, then reassemble the whole idea into a major unit of the senior course in American government. It's called the "American Free Enterprise System." And, like the philosophy behind the system itself, it works.

"We wrote the course more as an appreciation of free enterprise than as a textbook unit in economics," Patrick Noon, social studies coordinator at the suburban Longview school and one of the original designers, recalls.

"Basically, we felt our students should truly understand their own economic system before they graduate from high school—not just take it for granted because it's here."

Work on the customized course began in the summer of 1978 when the Pine Tree government teachers moved to Texas A&M University for a six-weeks seminar offered by the Center for Education and Research in Free Enterprise. They built a matrix of discussion, lectures, research, films, and field trips ready for class a full year before the Texas Legislature called for a similar required unit throughout the state.

American Economic System Studied in Detail

Today, every Pine Tree senior must pass a test on the free enterprise unit in order to graduate. In 1983, more than 300 students examined the comings and goings of money, incentives for production, the impact of inflation. . . all the elements of a system that defines their past and determines their future.

Plant supervisor explains operation of industrial chemicals unit.

Their economic present, which may or may not be linked directly to Texas Eastman Company, is explained in real life terms by executives from the Longview chemical plant. These teaching volunteers, who range from the chief accountant to the head of technology evaluations, even went back to school to learn to tell their story more effectively.

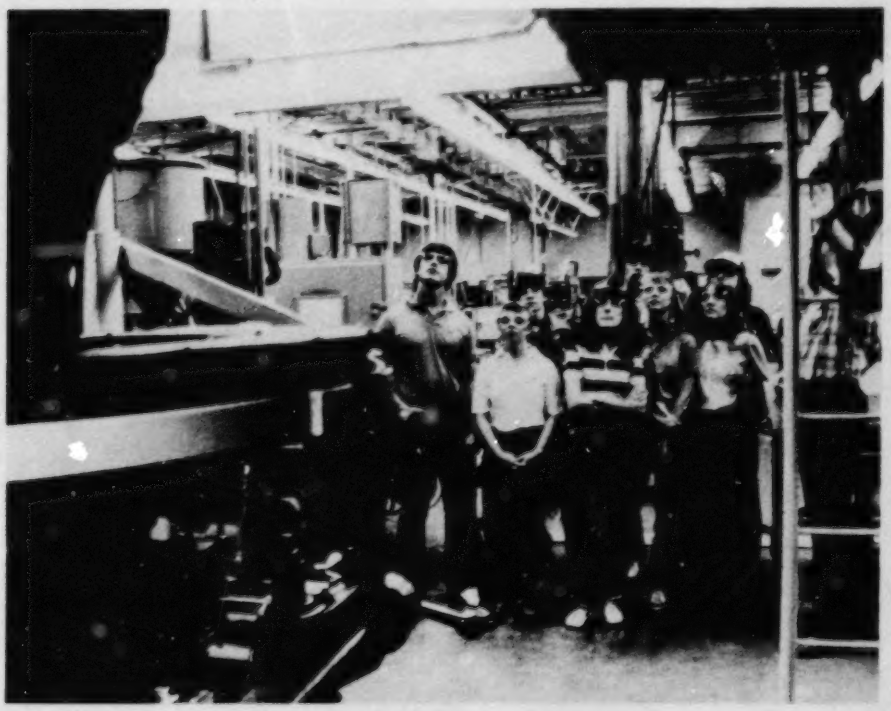
"We knew they really wanted to help when nine busy people volunteered to attend a two-day seminar at Texas A&M so they could learn precisely what we are trying to do," Noon recalls.

Executive classroom visits to Pine Tree High School focus on the day-by-day "Goals and Roles of Big Business," "Impact of Government Regulations," and "How Business Knows What to Supply," along with discussions of Texas Eastman itself and how it operates.

The company's own graduation present to the seniors—a unit-by-unit tour of the chemical plant complete with barbecue picnic—knits theory and practice together one morning each April.

"This field trip is always the high point because the students see so much action," Noon explains.

More importantly, they've learned about a dream. And seen it work.



Economic philosophy comes to life for students on tour of home town industry.

FORT BEND: Foundations for Excellence

This is the story of how one Texas school district is doing its level best to cope with the Sunbelt synonym for success: spectacular growth with no end in sight.

It is called "Foundations for Excellence—A Program for the 80's" and it involves a city/campus community of thousands.

Here is the setting. Fort Bend Independent School District, 181 square miles of broad and burgeoning flatlands southwest of Houston, is growing at a rate of 10 percent or 2,000 students a year. (That's the rough equivalent of three elementary school buildings.)

Office complexes, shopping centers, industrial plants, and who-knows-how-many miles of family home subdivisions pour an ever expanding hard surface over yesterday's fields and gardens. Another 6,000 lots are already measured and platted for the next building surge.

The school district, which counted seven buildings just a few years ago, is now a 20-campus investment with a new high school, junior high, and six elementary units in varying stages of development.

Still, space is not the only problem. Fort Bend continues to add about 200 teachers to its staff each year. They served a student body of 27,300 in 1982-83, a population expected to pass the 30,000 mark by mid-decade. So far, no one is willing to predict a stopping point.

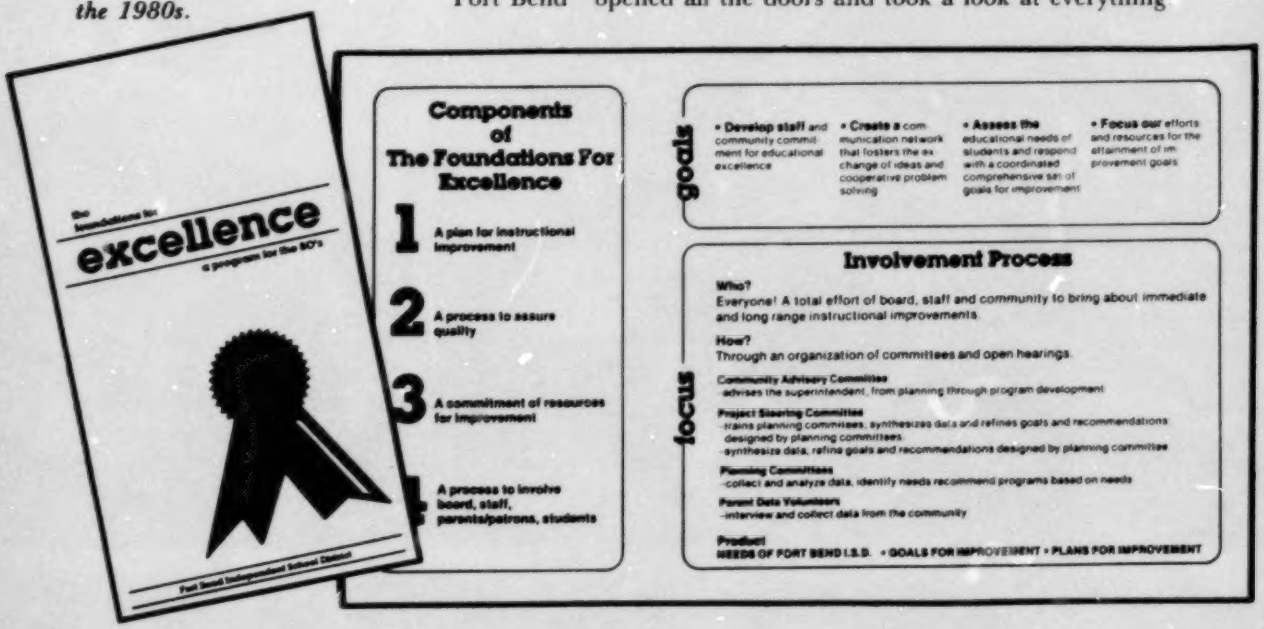
"The people just keep coming," Lawrence Elkins, superintendent of this typical growth district in what many consider an atypical state, says.

"But growth itself isn't the problem. Our challenge is to find new ways to manage change."

How do you meet that challenge?

Fort Bend "opened all the doors and took a look at everything"

Step-by-step plan targets district objectives for the 1980s.


excellence
Components of The Foundations For Excellence
1 A plan for instructional improvement
2 A process to assure quality
3 A commitment of resources for improvement
4 A process to involve board, staff, parents/patrons, students
goals
• Develop staff and community commitment for educational excellence
• Create a communication network that fosters the exchange of ideas and cooperative problem solving
• Assess the educational needs of students and respond with a coordinated comprehensive set of goals for improvement
• Focus our efforts and resources for the attainment of improvement goals
focus
Involvement Process
Who?
Everyone! A total effort of board, staff and community to bring about immediate and long range instructional improvements.
How?
Through an organization of committees and open hearings.
Community Advisory Committee
-advises the superintendent, from planning through program development
Project Steering Committee
-trains planning committees, synthesizes data and refines goals and recommendations designed by planning committees
-synthesize data, refine goals and recommendations designed by planning committee
Planning Committees
-collect and analyze data, identify needs recommend programs based on needs
Parent Data Volunteers
-interview and collect data from the community
Product
NEEDS OF FORT BEND I.S.D. • GOALS FOR IMPROVEMENT • PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

This process, which is still continuing, got underway in October 1980, following approval by the district board of education.

"We need to develop a sound comprehensive program to clearly show us the impact we're having on our students," Elkins told his community. "Schools don't have the business world's profit-loss margin. What we're judged on is how productive our students are in the business community."

The Foundations for Excellence Program was built on four major goals:

(1) Staff commitment for achieving educational excellence.

(2) A communications network that fosters the exchange of ideas and cooperative problem solving.

(3) Assessment of students' educational needs.

(4) Focus on human and financial resources to meet district needs.

Nearly 300 staff members worked with other volunteers from the community to examine all district operations through seven specialized committees. This meticulous cadence of questions and answers focused on: curriculum and educational programs, organizing and administering instruction, facilities and transportation, student support services, management practices and support structure, school-community relations, and personnel support services.

Volunteers Work Overtime to Set Priorities

"So many of our own staff members volunteered to work overtime that we must have received at least a $200,000 benefit—without a dime being spent," Elkins recalls.

Phase I of the program ended with a detailed review of the seven specialized reports by a steering committee of administrators and teachers along with a community advisory committee.

Phase II involved a more intensive analysis of additional data gathered through town meetings, interviews, and questionnaires. Results tabulated and analyzed by the districts included opinions from 4,126 students randomly selected from grades four through 12, a total of 1,049 teachers and other professional staff members, and 622 parents and other citizens in the community.

Results were compiled into a Final Position Report presented to the Fort Bend Board of Education. This report sets high, medium, and low priority items for future planning in seven key areas: curriculum and educational programs, organizing and administering instruction, student support services, facilities and transportation, personnel support services, management practices and support structure, and school/community relations.

"High Yield" Teaching Plan Begins in 1983-84

During 1982-83 some 150 staff members working in a series of study groups developed the new Fort Bend "high yield" teaching program. Based on the Foundations for Excellence Report, the new program will go into effect during the 1983-84 school year.

"There was a natural transition from the Foundations for Excellence Report to the new five-year plan required for continued state accreditation. For this reason, we believe the report will continue to provide a firm base for making the decisions which will set the pattern for growth in this district," Elkins points out.

"It was literally a labor of dedication by the community members and our staff who participated. We have confidence in it."

Fort Bend is ready for tomorrow.

KLEIN: Microcomputers

The microcomputer may well be the newest growth industry in Texas public schools.

You will find this keyboard-with-screen piece of tabletop hardware almost everywhere, solving classroom problems and processing laboratory data faster than you can say, "Texas is silicon prairie."

It is the school's newest middle ground, a technology acceptable to both the media generation (students) and the academic generation (teachers).

How do the students respond?

"It's like grass fire," according to Dr. Robert LeBlanc, Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Klein Independent School District.

How do the teachers respond?

"Once they learn how to use the machine, it's no problem."

Klein, a suburban district growing with that same grass fire speed northwest of Houston, installed its first classroom microcomputer in 1978. Today, even its third graders learn to link this product of the silicon chip to their own world of books and bulletin boards.

Computer literacy begins early for the media generation.

Gamesmanship Sparks Early Interest in Computers

Two parent volunteers, Mary and John Howe, will introduce some 1,500 third, fourth, and fifth grade students to the microcomputer this year. Their

Microcomputer is part of class day for many students.

routine (John, an airline pilot, joins Mary when his flying schedule permits) includes rotating three machines among 50 different classes in Klein's 11 elementary schools.

The youngsters are waiting with questions.

"Do you use a secret code?"

"Yes. But, it's called a program."

"Do you have Pac Man?"

"Sorry. He runs on another model."

Minute by minute, these children of the late 20th century begin to learn the lexicon of their generation. Words like cathode ray tube, loop, buffer, and binary numbers are heard for the first time or come dressed in new meaning.

The young students examine integrated circuits and memory storage, compare today's tiny transistor with yesterday's big vacuum tube, and even play a jungle game. When the time comes to put finger to keyboard, they treat the whole experience with the aplomb of a senior at graduation.

Computer Literacy Begins In Junior High

Later, they will get better acquainted with the hardware and the program software in a number of intermediate school classes.

Their introduction to microcomputers as working tools will come in the eighth grade (if not sooner) with a special three-week unit required for all high and regular math students. Here, they will study computer history, terminology, flowcharting, and BASIC language programming.

Microcomputers are introduced earlier to some math and language arts students in the sixth and seventh grades. During 1982-83 Klein offered a one-semester computer literacy elective in the eighth grade.

"This course is specially designed to offer students the kind of experience we believe they will need to understand and live in a technological society," Dr. LeBlanc says.

Computer mathematics courses, first offered to junior and senior students in 1979, are now scheduled six periods each day at K[illegible]in and Klein Forest high schools. Other students may use the microcomputer before and after school, with machines available from 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. each school day on a sign-up basis.

And that does include lunch hours.

Physics students use the computer to solve problems involving trajectory, velocity, and vectors and to complete other required course projects.

Klein Oak, the new high school which opened in 1982, is making its well-equipped computer laboratory available to both faculty and students working in all subject areas. Planned inservice unlocks the door, Dr. LeBlanc says.

"Then we just stand back and watch the teachers design their own ways to bring computer excitement into the classroom."

A few years from now those third graders may look back and wonder, "whatever happened to Pac Man?"

The answer is simple. He was replaced by Silicon Classroom.

EL PASO: Planetarium

Twelve years and countless light trackings across the deep blue metallic heavens since the El Paso Independent School District planetarium opened its doors in 1969, more than half a million students have become neighbors to the stars.

Eighth graders have mapped the vernal equinox, a point way out yonder where the ecliptic line and celestial equator intersect to once again announce the coming of spring.

Young star gazers in the third grade have taken their first serious look at planets, discovering a whole new universe in the sky.

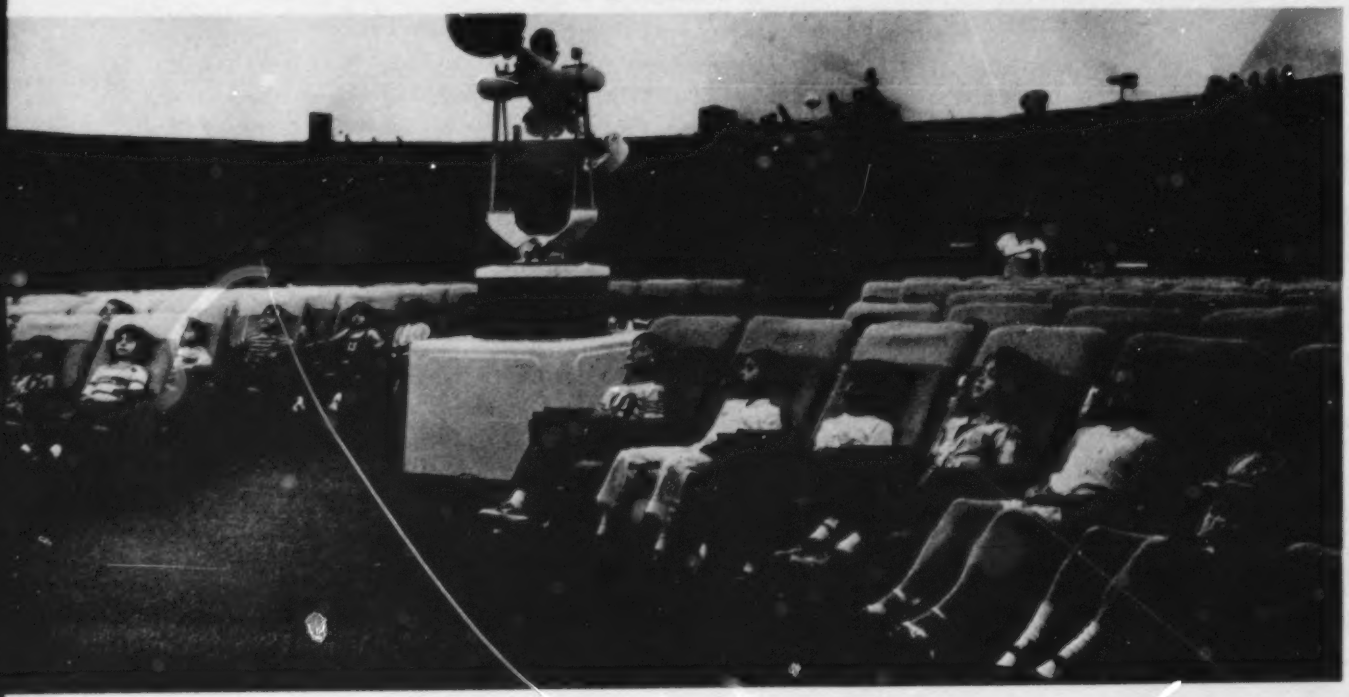
High school sophomores have sailed the constellations with Dr. Carl Sagan via a special 51-minute journey based on the famed astronomer's "Cosmos" television series.

These students, and thousands more from Van Horn on the east to a number of schools in New Mexico on the west, begin their once-a-year odysseys seated in cushioned chairs, heads tilted toward the dome.

Let's join a junior high group just getting off the bus after a 30-minute ride from across town.

The equipment for this science class planetarium laboratory session is simple: a heavy white paper star map hand-assembled yesterday in the classroom, a second sheet of paper for recording data, and a pencil. The two piece map includes a square section marked with the N-S-E-W directions in the four corners plus a circular drawing of the constellations on a separate sheet of cardboard which rotates inside the square.

We rotate the circle inside the covering square section to the precise point which will give us a preview of the El Paso sky tonight: 7 p.m., February 2,



Children "star gaze" during field trip to planets via earthbound planetarium.

1983. If we look just east of North, we can spot the Big Dipper standing on its handle.

During the next 40 minutes we will study the circumpolar region, looking first from map to sky then back from sky to map as Rich Calvird, planetarium director and our instructor-guide for this imaginary visit to the stars, sets both our pace and direction.

Optics Track Stars Across an Indoor "Sky"

Rich, a teacher-astronomer by profession, works indoor magic at the console, turning whole constellations on their axis with an easy move of a switch. Here he controls the planetarium projector located in the center of the circular room. This optical instrument, used to project light on the domed ceiling to create a sky effect, is actually the planetarium. The rest is just chairs and room to walk.

Each time Rich pulls back on the console "light" lever, our heads turn skyward, searching out the star markers for Taurus and Gemini, watching the effect of the tilt of the earth on rising stars.

The sequence changes and our projected sky becomes even more spectacular, surrounding us with a midnight world populated by Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Draco, Cepheus, and Cassiopeia. During the last quarter hour, we have used Polaris to find El Paso's latitude, diagrammed the celestial spheres, and traveled south to see how residents of Mexico City would view the circumpolar stars.

We have, in this high point of a junior high science unit on astronomy, almost literally felt the pull of space.

The El Paso planetarium, one of more than a dozen operated by school districts throughout Texas, is a place for capturing a student's imagination, lacing it with textbook learning, then turning it loose to roam our century's new frontier.

Junior League Offered Funds, Work, Support

It started as a cooperative idea generated by the El Paso Junior League and the school district's science coordinator in 1967. The bricks and mortar reality began taking shape in 1968, funded by seed money from the League and an additional allocation under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Construction of the domed addition to the El Paso ISD administration building on Boeing Drive was completed by the end of the year and equipment installed in January 1969. Calvird, aided by five docents from the League, began programming on March 1.

"I don't know what we'd have done without our annual 'committee of five' volunteer docents from the League during those early years," Calvird recalls. "A different set of volunteers would report in for the eight weeks crash course in astronomy every summer and then stay with us the whole year."

Later, students from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Texas at El Paso have helped Calvird present programs and operate the portable Star Lab which takes supplementary illustrated astronomy demonstrations to the school campuses.

"We're here to support the classroom teacher, to help that teacher bring the units on astronomy to life," Calvird points out. "As a result of this emphasis, about half the programs we present are designed with the cooperation of our own El Paso teachers."

Some programs for high school and adult audiences are purchased from other planetariums or from television producers.

The 51-minute "Planets of Doom," a largely special effects production based on the theoretical Jupiter Effect is particularly popular. Under this highly speculative theory, planets would converge on the same side of the sun, creating severe stress on the San Andreas Fault in California. Some calculations predict Los Angeles will slide into the Pacific before school starts again this fall.

(It hasn't.)

More than 2,000 El Paso citizens—including a solid base of astronomy buffs—visit the planetarium for special programs each year. Two of the most popular were written by Calvird several years ago and are still produced each December.

"The Star of Bethlehem" and "The Wise Men Followed A Star" are based on careful speculation and information gathered from both the New Testament and records left by early historians. The first, a children's program, explains the reasons Christians celebrate Christmas with gifts and star decorations. The adult program blends history, astronomy, astrology, and tradition.

This year, again, Rich Calvird and many of El Paso's most imaginative teachers will blend their own ideas with the planetarium's technology to bring new excitement into the classroom.

"When you come right down to it," Calvird smiles, "we're pretty basic."

In a far out kind of way.

Instructor describes changes in the night sky as students learn to track the planets.

DALLAS: Social Promotion

In Dallas, the policy of promoting students based on birthdays rather than achievement is an idea whose time has passed.

Social promotion is out. Reward for work produced is in. And, much to the chagrin of some students, grades are for passing.

The district, second largest in Texas and ninth in the nation, is taking just three years to bring all elementary and junior high students back on-line with an old public school tradition: make your grades or stay behind.

A companion move to stiffen requirements for high school graduation will be completely in place by 1985.

"We're going to do it," Linus Wright, general superintendent and point man for the policy change, says. "We're not going to let up. We're not going to forget and hope it will go away."

While Dallas and a number of other school districts throughout the nation began to take a hard look at social promotion 10 or more years ago, any steps toward change were more gradual than noticed.

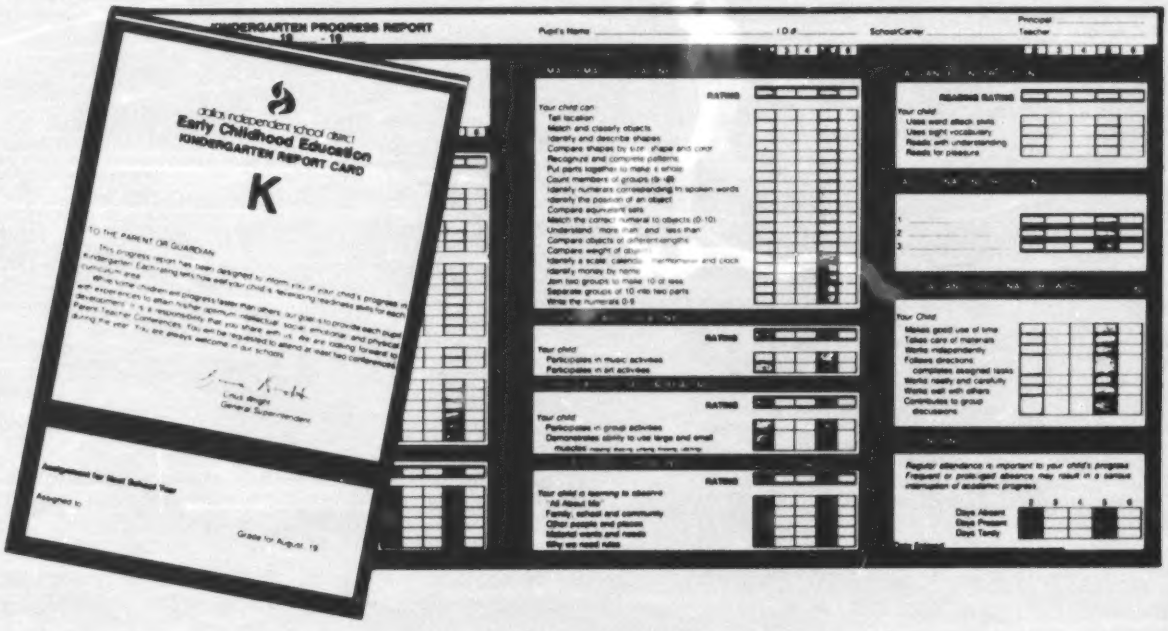
Then, in 1979, results of the first Texas Assessment of Basic Skills showed Dallas at the bottom of the Big Eight districts, both in scores and in student attendance.

"Worst of all," Wright recalls, "Dallas had the largest expenditure per student."

He set out to make improvements.

Wright's catalyst for change was a nine-member task force specially appointed and told to develop a promotion/retention plan in 60 days. Dr. Charla McCoy, who still lives in the administrative fast lane as project director, takes a practical yet almost idealized view of the problem.

"We need to get all our children well-grounded in the basics—so they can take advantage of all the other wonderful things we have to offer."



New report card gives parents detailed look at progress.

The plan designed by the task force and implemented in 1980 sets a five-year schedule for sharpening both students' skills and their understanding that success in the classroom does require effort.

The schedule is precise. Grades kindergarten through three would begin retaining students at the end of the 1980-81 school year, grades four through six in 1981-82, and grades seven and eight in 1982-83. (Kindergarten children would be held back only if their parents agreed that the extra year would give them the necessary time to mature and prepare for regular elementary school work.)

"Functional Literacy" Required for High School Diploma

Beginning with the Class of 1983, all high school students were required to pass a course in functional literacy before receiving a diploma. Students graduating before 1985 will also be required to complete 19 units of credit, one more than the state's requirement. Students scheduled to complete high school in 1985 or later must complete 21 units, including two from required academic enrichment courses.

The awareness is growing. Today, nearly three years after Wright first announced the program, many more students are literally making the grade. A combination of optional after school classes and six-weeks free but voluntary summer sessions is making the difference.

Here's one example of how it works. During the spring of 1981, the parents of 5,266 students in the first three grades were notified their children had not made the progress required for promotion. They were invited to send their youngsters to the free and voluntary summer session. As a result of this effort, 1,483 students who would otherwise have been held back were promoted to the next grade. Another 3,783 were retained in the first, second, or third grade.

"Summer school was not just a way around the obstacle," Dr. McCoy points out. "These children did indeed pass the minimum objectives required for their grade."

Students on "Failure Track" Take Extra Classes

During the 1981-82 school year, more than 80 percent of the 13,937 students in grades one through six identified as potential failures enrolled in special after school classes. The PALS (Providing Assisted Learning Strategies) program offers remedial instruction in mathematics, reading, and writing.

PALS classes, held four afternoons each week, are smaller than most with a maximum ratio of one teacher to 15 students.

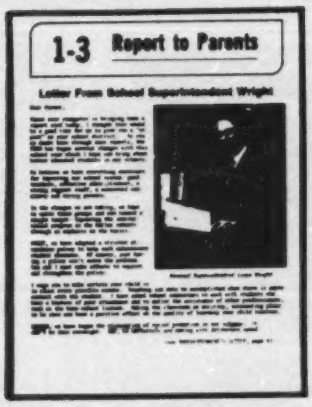
"We have an excellent group of teachers involved," Dr. McCoy points out. "Each one has already proved successful in working with low achieving students. And they're all willing to try out new ideas, new approaches to helping children learn."

At the same time, Dr. McCoy believes, the cooperation of parents is critical to the success of these children. For this reason, the district and its teachers send one basic message home:

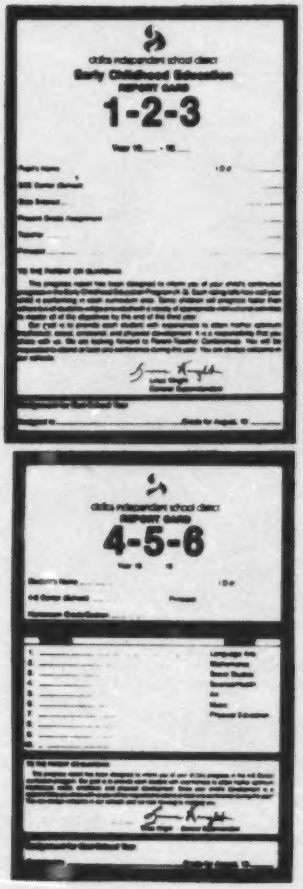
"Talk to your child. Praise your child. Listen to your child. Read to your child. Show a real interest in school."

A second message, this one much more formalized, comes to the parents via the district's new style report card. A succinct yet detailed audit of progress

Superintendent outlines objectives in periodic notes to parents.


1-3 Report to Parents

Entries cover academic, social, personal growth.



made during the past six weeks, the report card puts the parent on notice when a child is likely to be retained.

The parent of a fourth grader, for example, who learns from the report card that his child is reading on the second grade level may expect trouble ahead.

"While we do hold the teacher accountable for determining the strengths and needs of each student, no single person makes the decision to promote or retain," Dr. McCoy explains.

This decision is governed by a combination of test scores, the student's record, results of alternate methods of teaching, the teacher's own assessment, and the judgment of the school principal.

"The biggest challenge for teachers and principals is to approach each child differently," Dr. McCoy believes. "We must try to diagnose what's causing the problems—and then treat that cause."

This treatment may include tutoring by fellow students, smaller classes, even some re-structuring of the curriculum.

Yet, the focus remains the same.

"We must continue to try to get the off-level kids to stretch," Dr. McCoy says.

Then promotion will really be automatic—but never social.

McALLEN: Gifted and Talented

The words "gifted and talented" form a kind of magic vision in today's public school, an educational genie let out of the bottle to take teens into city hall and tinier tots into algebra well before their appointed time.

Magic, they are not.

Realistic? Yes, almost everyone will agree.

Long overdue in the small towns as well as the big ones?

You'll get no argument against that idea. Certainly you'll hear no negative votes among the parents who filled the kid-sized chairs and kept the questions humming in a McAllen elementary school library one night late last winter.

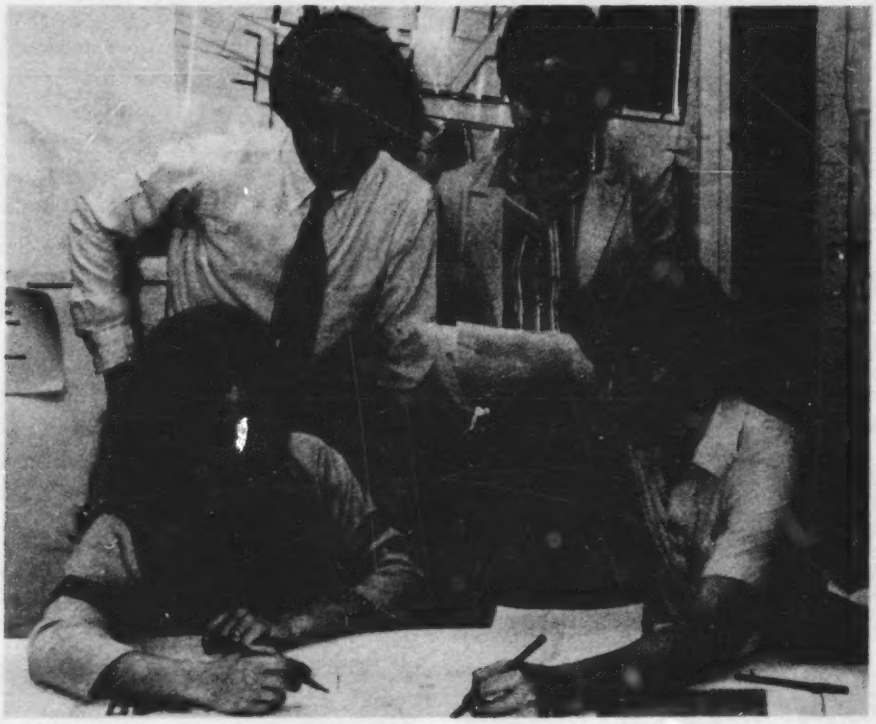
More than 60 mothers and fathers, many of them with small children in tow, had driven through rain and after-work traffic to gather around the library tables for this meeting of the Rio Grande Valley Association for Gifted/Talented Children.

They had come from Brownsville, Weslaco, Pharr, San Benito, Mission, Edinburg and all sides of McAllen to hear one of the area's best known pediatricians discuss one of their favorite topics: how do you recognize giftedness in young children?

"The most obvious sign is the way I see these children manipulate their parents."

Parents in the room laughed with appreciation—for the doctor's humor as well as the truth of his comment. The kids mostly looked at the ceiling.

"Children develop intellectual capabilities a lot sooner than I was taught in medical school 10 years ago," the doctor continued. "Some of them can really run the show at three or four months.



Students, city planners study growth patterns.

"Watch their facial expressions. You'll catch a surprisingly studious look at times. You can almost see the computers in their little heads really running. By the time a child is two or three years old, you'll know whether or not this one is gifted."

And then?

"You'll learn to cope—and hope the schools do, too."

One middle-aged father, gray in his sideburns and the resignation of experience in his voice, smiled and looked at his fellow parents.

"They think differently," he said. "This is hard on the teachers—and on the parents, too."

These parents, and thousands more across Texas, will find life made a little easier because their schools do recognize the learning needs of gifted and talented children. Most importantly, they are training teachers and developing programs to meet those needs.

Students Who "Think Differently" Get New Challenge

During 1982-83, more than 27,000 students participated in state-funded gifted and talented programs underway in 216 Texas public school districts. This year the $4.38 million allocation approved by the 67th Texas Legislature continued to fund statewide development as other districts joined the effort to provide advanced learning opportunities for gifted students.

The McAllen program is concentrating its efforts in two key areas of student talent: academically gifted and leadership ability. The two together helped shape this district's pilot effort to offer more of a challenge to senior students with above-average interest in government.

While this program uses the regular senior government course as a base, it offers a small number of students an open door to the adult world of city administration. Its centerpiece is a six-weeks internship in the office of the city attorney, planning department, and other municipal departments.

"We live what's happening; we don't just read about it."

This is one senior's summary of his six weeks in city hall.

Subdivision map work highlights internship.

"What I like the most is the way we're treated by the people downtown. They're really interested in us. In fact, I learned more during my volunteer internship in the parks and recreation department than all last summer when I was a paid employee."

City Hall Now Classroom for Gifted Seniors

The second-year nucleus of 13 students increased to 25 seniors with an interest in government operations in 1982-83. In class, they cover the regular work—plus a variety of special activities.

Today, the *Wall Street Journal* and other publications specializing in stock market reports cover student desks and dominate conversation as the classroom "investors" turn to the adult activity of making $100,000 grow in commas and zeroes through capital gains and dividends.

"I wonder," one student of the vagaries of the stock market says, "if stockholders in Disney can get free tickets to Disney World."

"Only if your stock—and your money—are real," his partner laughs.

These students have done more than make good grades, pass tests, and score extraordinarily high in the teacher's judgment. They have also signed contracts with the school to attend at least one school board meeting and one session of the city commission. Their detailed reports of their own impressions provide a written commentary on the often serious business of civic debate.

At least one young man in the class found adult responsibilities can come sooner—and with more difficulty—than expected.

"I was summoned for jury duty not long after my 18th birthday and was really excited. But then we voted to evict a family from the house five people called home. Somehow, my own view of humanity and my responsibility to the law came into conflict over that decision. I knew it was the right one, but it was still a hard thing to do."

McAllen, seventh fastest growing city in the nation among communities under 100,000, is raising its own future leaders to lead right at home.

Each year, the gifted and talented class seems destined to get even younger. For in 1982-83, the district's 17 elementary schools added the top five percent of their academically talented children to the program.

Some 1,700 of the 4,500 second, third, and fourth grade students were nominated for the program by their teachers, parents, or school administrators. The final selection, based on achievement and other tests plus detailed teacher evaluation keyed to nationally recognized rating scales, cut the final number to about 240 children.

"We will offer four classes in each grade, three through five," Mrs. Dee Trevino, coordinator for the gifted and talented program, explains. "At this rate, each one of our specially trained teachers will have a maximum of 20 children in each class."

Language and Math Are Points of Focus

Entry tests have focused on both communications or language skills and mathematics.

"Here in McAllen we have a large number of students who may not handle the English language too well, but who can make up for those scores with some astonishing skills in math. This way, we hope we don't miss any child who is truly gifted academically."

New classrooms have been added to two elementary schools to accommodate the special learning needs of these super bright youngsters.

"We'll operate two centers with two sections from each of the three grades in the new additions. The students will receive accelerated work in the specific academic skills, but attend all other classes—such as physical education and music—with the other students in the school."

The automobile trip from one night meeting of parents in a school library to a set of new metal classrooms on another elementary campus across town may take 20 minutes, depending on how you hit the traffic and the lights.

But, for those parents and for the children themselves, this program is taking McAllen public schools light years beyond the past.

HOUSTON: International Baccalaureate

Bellaire High School in Houston is helping to put a tired old myth to rest.

The myth: American public high schools don't demand the rigorous academic effort so common in other countries.

The reality: Sixteen members of the Bellaire Class of 1983 were awarded the International Baccalaureate diploma after completing a program based in Geneva, Switzerland, and ranked internationally as one of the most difficult in secondary education.

Bellaire, one of 45 high schools in the United States authorized to offer the International Baccalaureate program, was the first public school in Texas to qualify graduates for the diploma. Lamar and Westbury High Schools in Houston completed their first year under the program in 1982-83 while Madison and Sharpstown expect to begin offering the International Baccalaureate in 1983-84.

(Harlingen High School in Harlingen has completed its three-year development effort and is graduating its first International Baccalaureate student in 1983.)

More than 100 high schools in 37 countries from Argentina to the Yemen Arab Republic are participating in the program.

Academic Program Modeled on Worldwide Standard

The Houston school, home base for the district's magnet Foreign Language Academy and other efforts keyed to high academic achievement, would seem to be a logical pioneer.

"At Bellaire, we make no apologies for excellence," David S. McLure, school principal, says. "We simply don't tolerate lethargy."

There isn't time. A school which offers eight foreign languages—including Russian and Mandarin Chinese—along with heavy emphasis on advanced placement for college-bound students—is keeping everyone busy. (The advanced placement program of the College Entrance Examination Board has been available at Bellaire since 1968 and is still offered in the BI/AP classes.)

"Our students and their parents want us to require a strong academic effort," McLure adds. "We have built a faculty committed to that objective."

This commitment for teachers and students in the International Baccalaureate program is focused in six major subject areas offering a number of individual options:

Modern Languages, including the student's native language and one foreign language; Study of Man with options in history, geography, economics, philosophy, psychology, social anthropology, and business; Experimental Science with options in biology, chemistry, physics, physical science, and scientific studies; Mathematics; and a choice of plastic arts, music, classical language, additional modern language, computer studies, or a syllabus developed by the school.

The diploma candidate must also complete three additional requirements: a course in the Theory of Knowledge, a research report based on independent study in one of the required subject areas, and the equivalent of one afternoon each week spent in some creative or aesthetic experience or social service activity.

One Bellaire candidate, for example, played the violin in the Houston Symphony and Youth Symphony orchestras and did volunteer work at a local hospital.

Her most interesting course? Theory of Knowledge "because it taught us to examine whether or not what we had been taught was true."

Her most difficult course? Mathematics "because American students study algebra, geometry, and other math elements as separate subjects. This one forced us to link them all together in a European-style course."

The International Baccalaureate program has structured its requirements in terms of the objectives it sees as necessary for each student. However, it does allow the school considerable flexibility in the methods it uses to reach those objectives.

Target for Students: Nation's Top Universities

"While we expect an increasing number of International Baccalaureate program students to qualify for the diploma in the coming years, we know all 150 students won't want to put in the time necessary to meet all the requirements," McLure points out.

"However, those students who take the courses and pass the exams will qualify for advanced standing in many of the major universities both in this country and in 39 others around the world."

The courses offered at Bellaire and the other schools are based on syllabuses designed by the International Baccalaureate Office for two levels of achievement. Students may select three two-year courses and three one-year courses from the required list.

Historic doctrines draw close study.

During May, students throughout the world sit for the same examination in each subject—some responding in English, some in French, and a few in other languages. Each test will be graded by examiners in many countries adhering to uniform standards.

"We are teaching and learning in a truly multinational environment," McLure points out.

"Staff members from Bellaire have visited Geneva and other schools in this country which offer the program. We invite examiners from Harlingen and from schools in other states to interview our students and grade their papers. And we serve as examiners in other schools as well."

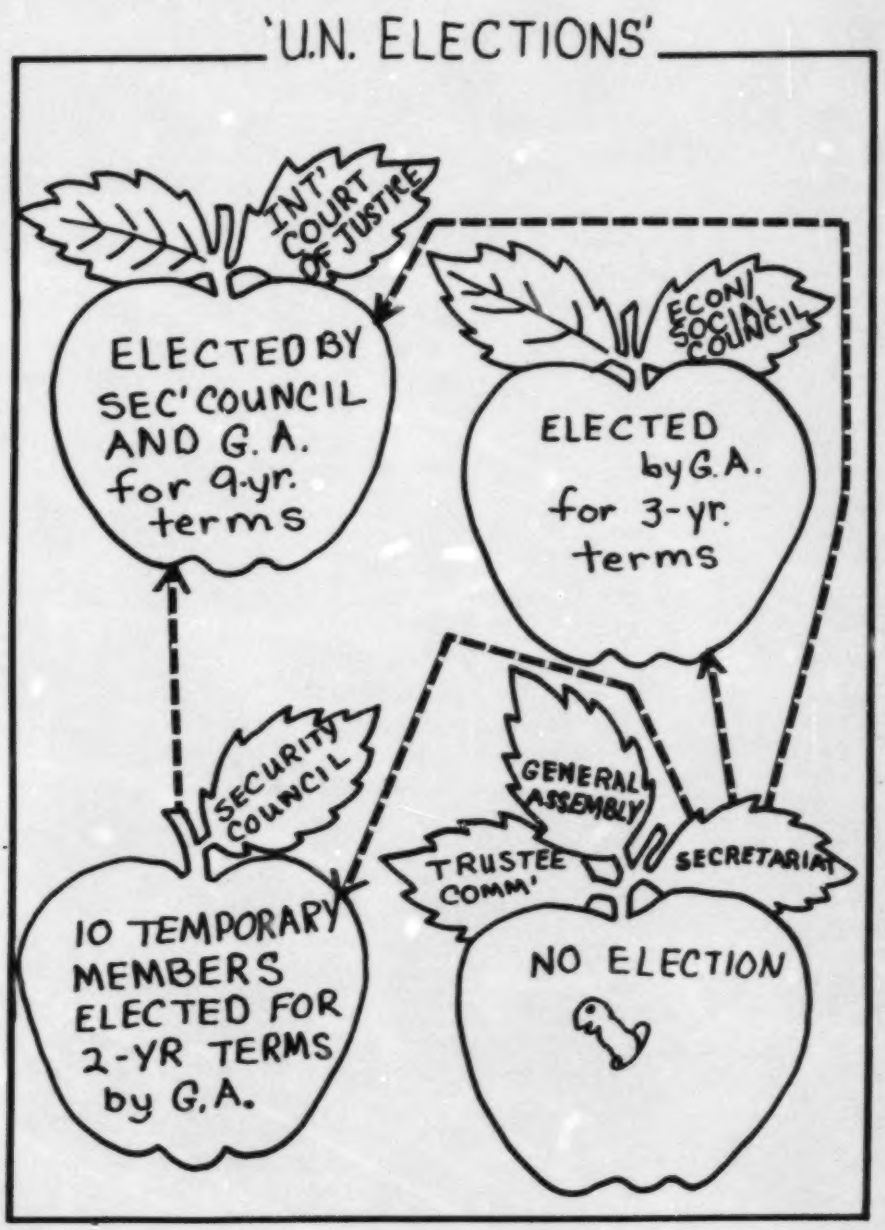
Chartered by the Swiss Government, the International Baccalaureate Office is governed by a Council of the Foundation. The North American branch, which has its headquarters in New York and includes schools in both the United States and Canada, is chartered as a not-for-profit corporation. It is governed by a 25-member board of trustees, including many of this country's top educators.

McLure, a school man who has given some 30 years of his life to public education in Texas, believes Bellaire is on the right road.

"The International Baccalaureate program will make a good school better," he says. "But, it won't make a poor school good. You must have a solid base of excellence at the beginning."

How solid is Bellaire?

Eighteen ninth graders whose parents live in the Bellaire High School attendance area will transfer from private schools in September, 1983. Eight other students attending private school but who live in other attendance zones have also requested entrance to Bellaire in the 10th grade. Another 44 students attending public school in other attendance zones have also requested transfers to Bellaire.



CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS: Study Skills

Cypress-Fairbanks may well be the nation's first school district to understand that the ability to study is not an inherent rite of teenage passage.

And to do something about it.

For most 14-year-olds need more than a change of campus to ease their junior to senior high school metamorphosis. As one startled freshman, holding his first high school report card, told his equally nonplussed parents, "No one in junior high ever got a zero!"

Senior high school, he just discovered, is more of an academic real world keyed to cramming one's head with the important—and keeping it there.

Today, most Cypress-Fairbanks ninth graders are skipping "zero" enroute to increasing academic success. They are members of the district's fourth annual required study skills course for all high school freshmen.

"Several years ago we noticed a string of poor scores on the Scientific Research Associates achievement tests taken by many of the students," Mrs. Deanna Swenke, district director of secondary instruction, recalls.

"Naturally, we were concerned. So we looked at all the factors involved and came to one decision. Our students simply did not know how to study."

The answer seemed inevitable: teach them.

How Do You Teach Students To Study?

Mrs. Swenke, then English coordinator for the district and director of instruction for Jersey Village High School, chaired the team which put the first study skills program on paper in 1978. The first class of ninth grade students began studying how to study in 1979.

Originally conceived as a means of helping students who had difficulty in coping with the new academic rigors of high school, the program's target audience today includes every member of the ninth grade class.

"The decision to require this course of all freshmen was inevitable once we evaluated the 1979-80 pilot program at Jersey Village High School," Mrs. Swenke says. "That single freshman class achieved more than one year's academic growth within a single year."

And everyone benefits.

"We believe the gifted and more academically able students learn as much as anyone," Mrs. Swenke points out. "They simply move into the more advanced study skills sooner."

What do students study in study skills?

Much of the course content may sound familiar to them and to their parents. Other items seem to come straight out of the catalog for a graduate school of business.

There is time management, for example, a skill many adults have still to master. The list also includes memory training, critical thinking and problem solving, speed reading, and listening skills. Students will also practice writing answers on essay tests, organizing material, writing research papers, and building a strong vocabulary.

"One of our most important objectives," Mrs. Swenke points out, "is to teach students how to study-read textbooks in the different content areas. "The specific nature of each subject determines the approach for study-reading."

A short story in an English course and a chapter in a biology textbook, for example, are approached in quite different ways. (After study skills, perhaps with less trepidation.)

Study skills is more than a required course, however. It is a partnership of students, teachers, and parents working toward a single objective: academic achievement.

"Most parents we talk to want to know how they can help their children adjust to the demands of high school," Mrs. Swenke says. "So, we developed a plan or a list of suggestions designed especially for them."

This plan includes suggestions for encouraging home study, including 14 hours of work a week or an average of two hours each night.

"Every research report we've seen indicates the greatest memory loss occurs within 24 hours of the initial learning. For this reason, we tell parents students should review their notes and worksheets from the day's classes each night even though no additional work has been assigned."

Parents Speed Progress Toward New Grade Points

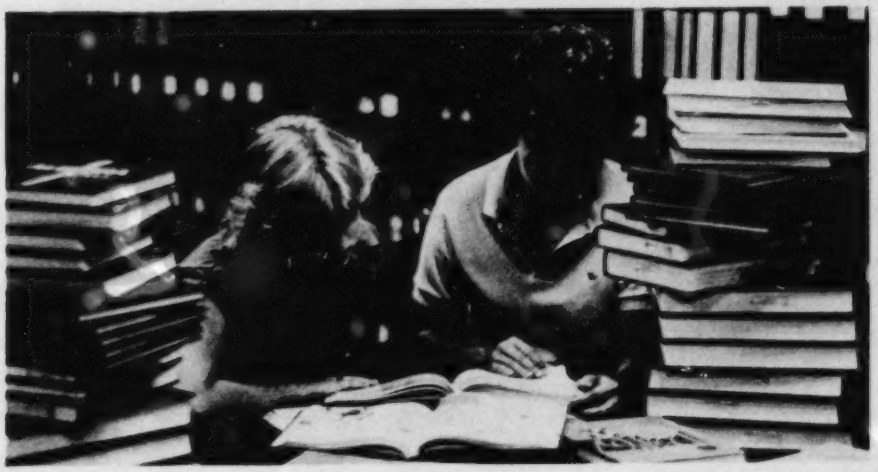
Parents are also asked to complete three brief survey reports each year assessing their child's progress in developing effective study habits. These reports, combined with student-teacher interviews, help the study skills staff adapt the program to each ninth grader's own needs.

"Students really begin to notice a difference in their own work after the first six weeks," Mrs. Swenke points out. "Now they're looking at the 'whole' of a course and not just its daily segments."

Last fall 18 teachers in the three Cypress-Fairbanks high schools welcomed the district's Class of '86 to its freshman year of study skills. They may well be unique.

"We have talked with school administrators from as far away as New Zealand, but no one seems to require study skills as a course of learning," Mrs. Swenke says. "I guess we started something."

The Texas academic pioneer spirit is alive and well and living in the suburbs northwest of Houston.



High school freshmen practice new skills surrounded by books, books, books.

JEFFERSON: Junior Historians

Jefferson is not one of those old southern riverboat towns that time and the railroad left sleeping in the sun, growing more paint-peeled and weed-choked through each turning of the generations.

For Jefferson is a lively if not booming town, one that doesn't see the disappearance of past glory as tragedy at all. Here, history has kept its sense of happiness intact.

This may well be the reason the Jefferson High School chapter of Texas Junior Historians can turn its members into gospel singers and can-can dancers every spring.

For early May is Pilgrimage Week and Riverboat Showtime along the Big Cypress Bayou when Jefferson's living generations sharpen their harmony, open their houses, and generally get ready to welcome visitors by the bus and car load to the frontier South of deep East Texas.

All through the rest of the year the Junior Historians, some 30 students with their sense of place and time more than usually intact, have combined home town research with hours of hard labor to win more statewide awards than any similar group in Texas. They may be writing a little history of their own.

As one student says, history is a happening in Jefferson. And it seems to happen all year long.

Outdoor theater seating takes shape on hillside.

Jefferson's Junior Historians, organized in February 1971 with 15 charter members, has been named the top chapter in the state for the ninth time in 1983. During this same period, more than 35 student members have won first prize or honorable mention in national and state essay competitions.

The chapter has also been honored by three national groups, including the Award of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1975, the Freedom Foundation at Valley Forge in 1978, and National History Day at the University of Maryland in 1981.

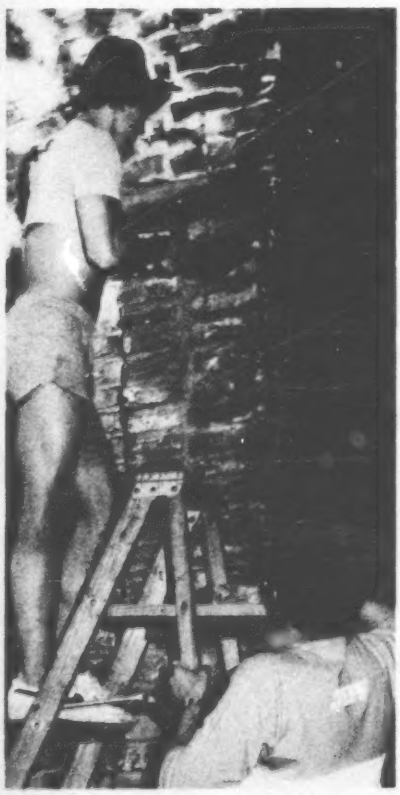
Yet, history, to these teenage buffs, has more heft to it than a long interview with a great grandfather or hours spent among the fading documents in the local library. It is the reality of red brick streets still providing a well-marked path from one block to the next or the promise of a one-time landmark bypassed by modern commerce and left to crumble in the shade.

Teenage History Buffs Re-build Wagon Factory

In August, 1974, the Jefferson Junior Historians, fresh from their "outstanding chapter" award presented at The University of Texas in Austin, made a down payment on the first restoration project attempted by any high school group in the state.

Their project: a two-story brick building originally designed as a wagon factory in pre-Civil War Jefferson when packet boats from New Orleans made the town's 10-block wharf area a transit center for all North Texas, Oklahoma, and points west.

Students re-build walls of pre-Civil War factory.



"The students wanted something they could really put themselves into—and this sure has been it," David Robertson, Jefferson High School history teacher and chapter sponsor, says.

It sure has. This old building which once housed a hat maker for the Confederate Army, a post-war saloon, and meeting hall for various lodge organizations, is now getting at least its fifth chance at a new life. No. 61 Dallas Street is the home of the Junior Historians' own Riverboat Theater.

It has a floor scraped down to bare earth, rafters that leaked with increasing enthusiasm after each heavy rain, and ceiling joists dangling at both ends of the pitched roof. But the walls were still standing in a kind of vine-covered challenge, if not reassurance.

Today, leakless in the roof and sturdy in the rebuilt walls, the old factory turns into a dinner theater once each year during Pilgrimage Week. Just about every teenager in town sings, dances, tells knee-slapping jokes, or carries heaping plates of barbecue to parents and visitors grouped shoulder-to-shoulder around the rough wooden tables.

The stage is an old bowling alley and the show is strictly fun with a minstrel format, old-time music, and jokes that seem to come off the wall as the students move from act to act. It is fun. And it also earns the funds necessary for this Junior Historians chapter to pay its debt on the building.

Next, the students will take their own history one more step forward as they finish cutting the outdoor amphitheater into a pine-rimmed hillside behind No. 61 Dallas Street.

"We plan to stage the Riverboat Show outside in the new Levee Theater in May," Robertson says, pointing to the new steps, the brick-walled seating, and the old log cabin which will serve as a dressing room.

The cabin, one of the first built in this East Texas frontier country, was moved from its original location and reassembled by the students. Weather-worn and comfortably at home among the tall pines, the cabin is still called the McPhail Homestead.

That was its name for well over a century and the students see no reason to change it now.

History, after all, is history.

Amphitheater combines old cabin and new stage.

MISSION: Bilingual Education

The question is almost as old as human time: how do you teach one person's language to another person so the two can sit down together and talk?

The answer, at least as defined by one school district in the Texas Valley, is as new as today's technology. You program computers for kids—and kids for computers.

This idea is the centerpiece of a plan that has helped bring some 1,300 primarily Spanish-speaking children in the Mission Independent School District up to grade level in all subjects at the same time they are learning to live in English.

"We've never seen this happen before," Mrs. Irma Leo, district bilingual director points out. "We're making real progress now."

Mission is making the kind of progress that may be inevitable when you're willing to write a little history at the same time. For this district's computerized language laboratory is the first of its type to be used at the elementary school level anywhere in the United States.

The district uses two computer programs, one for computer-assisted instruction and the other for the language laboratories located in eight elementary school classrooms. Students served by the federal Title I and migrant programs—which include most of those enrolled in bilingual classes—spend at least part of the school day at a computer terminal.

Does it work?

According to Mission test scores, children practicing their reading skills at the individual computer terminals make one month gain for each month of instruction. The mathematics results are even more heartening. Here the students are gaining two to three months of learning for each month of instruction.

Does the computer know something human teachers have yet to learn?

"Not at all," Mrs. Leo smiles. "But, it does have infinite time and patience."

The result is a kind of friendly interaction between the young human and the seemingly impersonal terminal with its screen and keyboard.

"This interaction is probably our most valuable tool," Mrs. Leo explains. "Each time a child makes an error, the computer points it out instantly. And each time a response is correct, the machine confirms it. The relationship soon becomes quite personal—at least for the student."

English-on-computer begins school day.

This interaction is a highly valuable tool in teaching a child a new language.

"The student is establishing a whole new set of habits in both mind and muscles. These habits must be learned so well they will function automatically," the bilingual education specialist points out.

"In the early stages, these learning processes depend on the number of interactions that occur between student and teacher. And this is why computers are so important to our program."

Computer Offers Patience, Patience, Patience

The key to success can be captured in a single word: repetition.

For example, one of 20 children may be lucky to have four or five contacts with the teacher during a single class period. Seated in front of a computer terminal, that same student may have 40 to 50 interactions with the inanimate "teacher" during the same class period.

"Of course, the human teacher is still the key," Mrs. Leo says. "She guides the student, answers questions, and generally oversees the whole process day by day.

"But, it is impossible for the teacher and a classroom aide to give each child the kind of individual attention they get from the terminal with its TV-like screen and instant responses."

Mission began its computer-assisted instructional program with one campus laboratory in 1978. Today, some 1,300 limited English speaking students practice their grammar and reading and speaking skills in 12 laboratories.

Students usually beat the bell as they get down to work in the labs. They head immediately for their assigned terminal, slip the microphoned headsets over their ears, and push the button. Program material from a two-track cassette flashes on the screen immediately. Each student's response is recorded on the second track.

"Each one of these children can record, erase, and re-record over his own track," Mrs. Leo explains as the room settles into a quiet class session. All the sound is in the headsets.

"But, he still can't control the first track where the lesson is stored."

Minute by minute, the youngsters work to improve their understanding of the sounds of English and how to relate those sounds to written words and language patterns. Some may focus their attention on new words or on the letters that make up those words.

Kindergarten children learn new words.

"I really believe these children learn more logical thinking skills much earlier through this laboratory work," Mrs. Leo says. "No other type of formal instruction seems able to do this quite as well."

Silent Reading Develops Sense of Sound

Best of all, she says, this computerized system helps the children develop the sense of sound while reading silently to themselves.

The usually audible signals of sentence structure, such as intonation and pause, are easily reinforced through the computer drill. The more traditional methods of teaching written language lack certain cues which are found only when it's spoken.

The district's main computer center located on the high school campus provides a data bank of instruction and retrievable facts for students working in trigonometry, physics, and 19 other courses. Four computers linked to 216 terminals form an electronic network available to 4,500 students every day.

Their use seems infinite.

But, the rapport between student and machine is highest in the elementary campus computer laboratories. For here, children who know little English are learning the language of their campus and of the world in which they will live and work.

Perhaps we should say the languages of their future—English and computer talk.

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;
(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis;
(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;
(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;
(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;
(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and
(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; TITLE IX, 1973 EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; AND VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED IN 1974.

It is the policy of the Texas Education Agency to comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or handicap constitute a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency makes positive efforts to employ and advance in employment all protected groups.